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UNCLAS ANKARA 004186

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SUBJECT: MERSIN REFINERY FIRE CONTROLLED

(U) THIS CABLE IS FROM AMCONSUL ADANA.

1. (U) A FIERCE FIRE BROKE OUT ON JULY 25 AT ATAS OIL REFINERY IN MERSIN. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, A TANK CONTAINING SOME NINE THOUSAND CUBIC METERS OF CRUDE OIL WAS ABLAZE THROUGHOUT THE DAY AS FIREFIGHTERS WORKED TO PREVENT THE FIRE FROM SPREADING TO OTHER AREAS OF THE REFINERY. MERSIN FREE ZONE GENERAL MANAGER EDWARD MUM CONFIRMED TO DPO THAT, BY THE MORNING OF JULY 26, THE FIRE WAS UNDER CONTROL AND WAS NOT IN DANGER OF SPREADING NOR, HE CLAIMED, OF CAUSING SERIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE. THE CAUSE OF THE BLAZE IS UNDER INVESTIGATION AS OF JULY 27.

2. (SBU) THE ATAS REFINERY FACILITY IS A SUPPLY SOURCE FOR THE NORTHERN GROUND LINE OF COMMUNICATION TRANSPORTING FUEL TO IRAQ AND THE STALLED IRAQ-TURKEY BOTAS FUEL PIPELINE. AT THE TIME THE FIRE BROKE OUT, THERE WERE TWO DAYS OF FUEL IN STORAGE VESSELS AT THE REFINERY, AWAITING ON-LOADING TO TANKER TRUCKS FOR TRAVEL INTO IRAQ. DUE TO THE VOLATILITY OF THE FUEL AND THE STRENGTH OF THE FIRE THAT BROKE OUT ON JULY 25, MERSIN FIRE OFFICIALS HALTED THE LOADING OF ALL TANKER TRUCKS ON BOTH JULY 25 AND 26. OUR CONTACTS ON THE MILITARY LOGISTICS TEAM EXPECTED LOADING TO RESUME ON JULY 27. (NOTE: UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO THE DYSFUNCTIONAL SITUATION AT THE HABUR GATE, THERE ARE CURRENTLY ONLY TWELVE CERTIFIED TANKERS AVAILABLE FOR TRANSPORTING FUEL; THEREFORE, IF THERE WERE AN "OPPORTUNE" MOMENT FOR THIS TWO-DAY INTERRUPTION IN LOADING, THIS WAS IT. PREVIOUSLY, 60-70 TANKERS HAD BEEN LOADING AT ATAS EACH DAY. END NOTE.)

3. (u) IT IS UNCLEAR IF THE FIRE WILL HAVE ANY IMPACT ON FUTURE PRODUCTION. IT MAY BE, HOWEVER, THAT INDEPENDENT OF LAST SUNDAY'S FIRE, THE REFINERY'S CURRENT PRODUCTION (REPORTEDLY SOME 40,000 BARRELS/DAY, UNDER HALF OF ITS CAPACITY) WILL SOON COME TO AN END. REUTERS BUSINESS REPORTED ON JULY 16 THAT TURCAS PETROL HAD ANNOUNCED IN JUNE THAT THE REFINERY WOULD BE CLOSED BY SEPTEMBER AND CONVERTED INTO AN "OIL PRODUCTS TERMINAL." A CONTACT AT MERSIN'S CHAMBER OF MARINE CONFIRMED THAT A DECISION HAD BEEN MADE TO CEASE PRODUCTION AT THE REFINERY, PERHAPS AS EARLY AS THE END OF JULY. ACCORDING TO REUTERS, BP HAS A 68 PERCENT SHARE IN THE REFINERY, SHELL 27 PERCENT AND TURCAS 5 PERCENT.

4. (U) THIS REFINERY HAS BEEN A TARGET FOR DOMESTIC TERRORISTS IN THE PAST -- IN DECEMBER 1997, FOR EXAMPLE, A TIME BOMB WAS FOUND INSIDE A GAS CYLINDER AT A FACILITY ADJOINING THE REFINERY, BUT WAS DEFUSED BY AUTHORITIES. AT PRESENT WE ARE AWAITING DETAILS ON THE INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT.

5. (U) BAGHDAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.  
DEUTSCH